

Substantive Aspects of the Khrushchev Visit

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KHRUSHCHEV VISIT  
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KHRUSHCHEV: The Man and His Outlook

(Background Paper)

By any standards Khrushchev is an extraordinary person. He is simultaneously a handshaking, back-slapping, grass-roots politician who could draw a good vote in any democracy and a shrewd and ruthless manipulator of power in the best totalitarian tradition. A largely self-made man who received only the sketchiest kind of education as a youth, he is now the poor man's universal genius with solutions to all problems, complete with appropriate anecdotes and proverbs, an expert on everything from silage to outer space. An uninhibited ham actor, who often illustrates his points with the crudest sort of barnyard humor, he is endowed on occasion with considerable personal dignity. Proud of his proletarian origin, he is, nevertheless, determined to receive full recognition and honor as the authentic leader of a great world power. While attacking the glorification of Stalin's person, he has permitted a growing degree of adulation of himself.

Capable of extraordinary frankness, and in his own eyes no doubt unusually honest, he can also on occasion be a gambler and dissembler, expert in calculated bluffing. The butcher of Budapest, he considers himself an optimistic lover of and truster in humanity. While priding himself on his realism and particularly his mastery of the realities of the balance of power, he is imbued with the idea that he can utilize Soviet power to move the world toward Communism during his lifetime.

In addition to his own personality, the historical environment in which Khrushchev has been operating has been an important factor conditioning his concepts and his tactics.

In the latter part of Stalin's lifetime the rigid system of psychological and physical coercion that was Stalinism had reached the point of diminishing returns. Despite the tremendous gains in Soviet industrial and military power that had been achieved, by the time of his death stagnation threatened

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the further growth of Soviet power, and lack of faith and popular apathy were sapping the ideological foundations of the regime. Stalinism, moreover, had led to the continued diplomatic isolation of the bloc; Soviet influence abroad had grown only slightly and in no way commensurate with the growth in Soviet military and industrial power. Soviet agriculture, housing and consumers' goods production lagged far behind the USSR's impressive achievements in heavy industry.

With Stalin's death there ensued, of necessity, a partial diffusion of political power among the surviving major Soviet leaders and among the major Soviet institutional structures; for a time the pyramid of Soviet totalitarianism, which demands an apex, was left without a single, clear source of authority.



In many ways Khrushchev's personality fitted him for the task he took upon himself. At the same time it conditioned the way in which he set about utilizing and developing the great assets which he inherited from Stalinism while shedding in so far as possible its liabilities. He tried to overcome the apathy and stagnation left by Stalinism with his own energy and enthusiasm. He sought to counter the lack of faith in communism, which was part of the legacy of Stalinism, with a communist "revivalism" buttressed by his own faith in the dogma which he had been taught as part of his first formal education. Together with this faith, his grass roots knowledge of the country and his realism helped him in the necessary effort to close the gap which existed between the Soviet theory of how things ought to be and the realities of the existing Soviet system. His familiar manner, his histrionic proclivities and his semi-comical appearance, together with his knowledge of popular wants and aspirations, helped him gain a greater measure of consent on the part of the population for the regime at the same time that his ruthlessness, boldness and shrewdness were permitting him to eliminate his rivals on the ladder to supreme power.

Needing to reduce the element of coercion in Soviet rule but lacking the resources in consumers' industries and agriculture that would have made a more mundane system of incentives sufficient, Khrushchev has sought to run, and simultaneously remould, the country by a series of major mobilizing and inspirational campaigns: plant more corn, plough up the virgin lands, eliminate frills in architecture and use concrete slab construction, show more local initiative, decentralize administrative authority, overtake the United States in per capita production.

Partly because of this mobilizing approach, but partly owing to the nature of his own mind, Khrushchev has collected and passionately

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espoused simple solutions to complex problems. In this he has, of course, drawn heavily upon the ideas of others. In domestic affairs his ideas have originated with many sources, some of them presumably obscure. In foreign affairs, where Mikoyan appears to have been the originator of his principal concepts, he initially sought to promote the growth of the USSR's influence abroad and its escape from diplomatic isolation by making the USSR seem less sinister while at the same time boldly seeking to weaken its western adversaries by promoting neutralism and anti-westernism among the underdeveloped countries. With the shock to the Soviet system involved in the Polish and Hungarian events of 1956, he has increasingly sought to use the USSR's growing military and industrial power to demonstrate to people inside the bloc that the Soviet system would work, was working and would triumph. Especially since the advent of the Soviet ICBM in 1957, he has used Soviet power and the prospect of its further growth to convince people in the outside world that the USSR is a force to reckon with and to oppose only at one's peril.

In all of his efforts in both domestic and foreign policy, Khrushchev has appeared to be in a hurry. While maintenance of pace is to a degree inherent in his method of rule, it is possible that for more personal reasons he may feel under pressure from time. Whereas Lenin and Stalin had twenty or twenty-five years in which to make their contributions to communist history, Khrushchev on his accession to the Party First Secretaryship in 1953 was faced with the prospect of considerably less time in which to make his mark. Although he is now only 65, recently he seems to have his health and his age very much on his mind. While neither his liver nor kidney ailments appears particularly serious, it is possible that his weight and the ferocious pace that he maintains may combine to fell him before his time.

Khrushchev has many and at times conflicting objectives. It seems, however, that the complexity of the problems faced and the probable slowness of success in other fields are making him turn to an increasing extent to the political utilization of the USSR's gains in military power as the principal field in which he hopes to write his page in history in the time which he visualizes as available to him.

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KHRUSHCHEV, Nikita Sergeevich

N. S. Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the U. S. S. R. Council of Ministers, is a veteran Party leader who has served on the Central Committee (CC) since 1934, on the Presidium (formerly Politburo) since 1938, and as Chairman of the CC Bureau for Affairs of the Russian Republic (RSFSR) since its establishment in 1956. Khrushchev has surmounted formidable opposition to become the dominant political figure in the Soviet Union; his powers, however, have so far been exercised more as a successful politician than as a despot in the Stalinist mold.



Sixty-five-year-old Khrushchev was born in a village just north of the Ukraine. He is possibly of Ukrainian origin although he has described himself as Russian. However, he has spent many years in the Ukraine, where he worked as a miner and metal worker, joined the Party (1918) and served in the Red Army as a political officer during the Civil War. Demobilized, he held minor Party posts until 1929, when he attended the Academy of Heavy Industry in Moscow. Khrushchev rose through Moscow Party ranks, apparently as a protegee of L. M. Kaganovich, whom he succeeded as Party boss of Moscow in 1934-35. After the great purges of 1937-38, for which, as a participant, he must share responsibility, Khrushchev was transferred to Kiev as First Secretary of the Ukrainian Party. Arriving there in the wake of a most extensive purge, he rebuilt the Party apparatus; many of his associates from this period continued to benefit from his patronage during his subsequent career.

During World War II Khrushchev served on Military Councils of the South-western Front, including Stalingrad, where he was promoted to lieutenant general (a two star rank). After the liberation of the Ukraine, he returned to his Party duties there, simultaneously assuming leadership of the Ukrainian government. He conducted a mass replacement of the Ukrainian Party and government officials, many of whom had shown political unreliability during the war, but encountered difficulties in postwar reconstruction. In 1949 Khrushchev returned to Moscow as First Secretary of the Moscow Party organization and Secretary of the All-Union Central Committee. As in the Ukraine, he restaffed the Moscow Party with his own appointees. He also participated in the reorganization of other regional Party units, and presented proposals of the Central Committee for revising the Party Statutes to the 19th Party Congress (1952).

In the conflict for leadership that ensued after Stalin's death, Khrushchev gained control of the Party machinery when Malenkov had to leave the Secretariat (March 1953); from this base, where he received the title of First Secretary in September 1953, he maneuvered effectively against his rivals, first bringing about Malenkov's resignation as Premier (February 1955), then removing from power the

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"anti-Party" group of Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich (June 1957), Marshal Zhukov four months later, and finally N. A. Bulganin, whom he succeeded as Soviet Premier in March 1958.

A colorful and energetic politician, Khrushchev has been credited with initiating bold policies in all areas of Soviet life. He repudiated Stalinist excesses at the 20th Party Congress (February 1956), promised a liberalized regime with higher living standards for all, carried through extensive reforms in agriculture and the administration of industry, and travelled extensively abroad on behalf of Soviet foreign policy and to preserve the ideological unity of the Soviet bloc. Those who have dealt with Khrushchev report that he is usually well briefed on specific technical questions, but that his understanding of the West is based on Marxist cliches. His approach to Soviet internal problems, however, is pragmatic rather than doctrinaire.

Married a second time, Khrushchev has two daughters, one living son, and grandchildren. An older son was lost during World War II. His decorations include five Orders of Lenin, the titles "Hero of Socialist Labor" and "Hero of the Soviet Union," and the Lenin Peace Prize, which he received in April 1959.



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